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POLICIES AND INITIATIVES: REFORMING TEACHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Abstract

Much discussion surrounding educational policy currently is international in character. Governments, policy makers, stakeholders and many international organizations of both developed and developing countries have become concerned with how policies, practices, and outcomes in one country can be compared with those in other countries. Comparative Education, as a subject of study, is more often found at the post-graduate than at the under-graduate level of university studies. Time is allocated for the introduction of the subject of Comparative Education. The field of Comparative Education is introduced in its historical perspective, and students learn about the few chosen foreign educational systems and institutions. In the teacher training programmes there is hardly any space and time left for the specific issues with which Comparative Education is also concerned, such as minority education, education of women, economics and politics of education, cross-cultural education, and others. It is felt, that the training of teachers should include important matters with which they will have to deal in their classroom, and which pertain to problems of social relations in the contemporary world. The contents of Comparative Education studies designed for the teacher training programmes should, include relevant anthropological-cultural studies, seeing teacher as boarder crosser, teacher as an inclusion, and teacher as purveyor of Human Rights. In this way, the Comparative Education would no longer be only an introductory, general informative course, but would better understand teacher education as to promote practice of sustainable development.

Keywords: Policies, Initiatives, Reforming, Teacher Education, Comparative Education

Introduction

In the field of education, comparative studies have become much more sophisticated and marked by a growing sense of urgency and practicality. This is mainly due to the fact that there are no longer satisfactory answers to educational problems within one country or within one discipline.

Comparative studies, however, are by no means limited to the field of education. It is now a common phenomenon in discipline like law, medicine, psychology, religions and so on. Comparative studies can no longer be seen just as a course in teacher's preparation; rather it has become a part of the daily business of governments, manpower planners, and social reformers and indeed of parents and students demanding a fair deal in education and a greater participation in national life.

In the United States, federal, state and even some district-level policy call for benchmarking the performance of its educational system with that of other nations. Many other nations are also engaged in the collection and use of data on the comparative performance of their educational systems, and using them as important inputs for policymaking. Aware of the increasingly cross-national competitive nature of current trends in educational policy making, nations of the developing

world, newly democratic countries, and post-communist countries are also looking to comparisons of educational systems to inform domestic policy making which Nigeria is not an exception.

Comparing educational systems is not new. As modern educational systems have arisen, a vast body of scholarship has also originated, comparing causes and outcomes of a variety of different educational practices and purposes. But what does it mean to compare educational systems? What kind of knowledge do comparative studies of educational systems provide? How do teachers and their work (as defined by UNESCO) educate the world? Looking at their policies and initiatives in reforming teacher education in Nigeria is the bane of this paper.

The meaning of comparative education

All human beings make comparisons; they compare their clothes with that of their friends. Sometimes children compare other peoples' appearances with their own people. When they compare, they relate two or more things or people together, and thereby point out their differences or similarities. From this view, one can simply define comparative education as a subject in which relationships between two or more systems of education are found. Some of the definitions of comparative education are as follows:

Dictionary of Education (1971) defines comparative education as a field of study dealing with the comparison of educational theory and practice in different countries for the purpose of broadening and deepening understanding of educational problems beyond the boundaries of one's own country. It is also the identification and diagnosis of educational problems, determinants, ideals and presuppositions in given societies with a view to interpreting them by cross-reference to similar elements in other societies.

Comparative education is a field that studies the educational similarities and differences prevailing within a particular society or culture or among various societies and culture. This is true of African societies, which had their own systems of education before the arrival of western education. Therefore, in our studies of comparative education, one can study formal western educational systems in relation to informal educational systems that are part of African culture, the two can be studied within the same society.

Reasons for studying comparative education

- It gives us wider knowledge about all aspects of education which include formulating educational aims, planning for programmes of study, and educational administration or counselling;
- It helps us to see how practicable some of our educational theories are;
- It helps us to be able to criticize and to judge our educational practices;
- Comparative education keeps us informed about what is happening in education in other parts of the world;
- It increases the understanding of our own educational system;
- It helps us to think of ways of improving our educational system, as to plan for the future of education of the country;
- It helps us to understand changes that have taken place in educational

practice in the past;

- It helps us to understand the social and cultural values of many societies; and
- It exposes us to the problems and achievements of education in other counties.

From the above reasons for the study of comparative education, one thinks of the origin of National Policy on Education in Nigeria that gave birth to the policy on Teacher Education.

Provision of teacher education in Nigeria

The National Policy of Education was born out of the National curriculum conference held in Lagos in September 1969. In 1977 the Federal Military Government issued the first white paper on the National Policy on Education which contained the recommendation of the 1973 national seminar on this subject, thus indicating that the Federal Government had accepted the recommendations in principle.

Teacher education is dealt with in Section 9, Paragraphs 57 to 82 of the National Policy on Education (1981) document. The document emphasises the importance of teacher education right from its opening paragraph, that is, paragraph 57, where it declares that:

Teacher Education will continue to be given a major emphasis in all our educational planning because no education can rise above the quality of its teachers (FRN, 1981: 38).

Teachers are known to be responsible for the translation and implementation of educational policies. They also put into practice the principles of education. Every school child knows the teacher, so also, every parent, indeed, every member of the public if one does not know physically, hears of the teacher. This is because one cannot reasonably talk of the educational system without acknowledging the importance of the teacher in it. Teacher is the main stay of the educational system. Teacher promotes the teaching-learning process in various capacities as an instructor, educator, tutor, lecturer, counsellor adviser, researcher, innovator, exemplar, friend, parent, leader, and confidant and so on. As a result of these important and multiple roles teacher plays in the educational system, teachers' professional education requires careful planning and execution. True to type the history of teacher education in Nigeria is tied up with the efforts of experts in teacher education to fashion the best and most appropriate teacher education programmes for teachers in Nigeria at given periods.

The National Policy on Education provided a solid framework for such changes and challenges, yet much has not been achieved in teacher development in Nigeria. Bearing that framework in mind, the implementation of the latest teacher education programme is to be examined under the UNESCO Teacher as defined by UNESCO.

To enhance the quality of education therefore, provision should be made for the production of highly dedicated, devoted and competent teachers. This observation was probably considered in the formulation of the five objectives of Teacher education in the Nigeria National Policy document.

According to the policy document, Teacher Education aims at:

1. Producing highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of the educational system;

2. Encouraging further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
3. Helping teachers to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives;
4. Providing teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in the life of their country, but in the wider world;
5. Enhancing teachers' commitment to the teaching profession (FRN, 1981: 38).

UNESCO has therefore decided to structure the Teacher Education Programme in such a way as to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties.

UNESCO teacher: reforming teacher education in Nigeria

It is a known fact that globalization is increasing the diversity in our classrooms, altering the nature and role of technology in the classroom, as well as changing the nature of work and of community life in which our students are engaged or will be engaged. In these "New Times" teaching and the teacher need to be redefined (Luke & Elkins, 1998). Luke and Carrington (2002) have called for a re-envisioning of education that moves beyond the nation state to consider the contemporary cosmopolitan, trans-cultural, transnational contexts and conditions of students and teachers in the 21st century.

As many readers are no doubt aware, the United Nations Organization (UN) includes a General Assembly currently representing 193 member nation states from around the globe. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a specialized agency of the UN. UNESCO represents one of the outstanding non-governmental organizations working to address issues of global improvements in a wide array of areas related to education. As such, it is appropriate to draw from their extensive body of work in education for this analysis.

UNESCO has a long history of initiatives, but at the present time its work in education is organized into seven themes: early childhood, primary education, secondary education, technical and science education, higher education, literacy, HIV/AIDs education, and teacher education. At this time, the major priority of UNESCO is "Education for All" (EFA) which involves the provision of free, compulsory primary education to everyone by 2015. This follows the UN Millennium Development Goals. UNESCO believes that education is key to social and economic development. UNESCO works for a sustainable world with just societies that value knowledge, promote a culture of peace, celebrate diversity and defend human rights, achieved by providing Education for All (EFA). In this section, attention will be on how teaching and the teacher is articulated by the UNESCO policies and initiatives in relation to recent scholarship on globalization and the development of the cosmopolitan teacher can be used to reformulate teacher education in Nigeria.

The UNESCO teacher: teacher as professional

Teaching should be regarded as a profession: it is a form of public service which requires teachers' expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study; teaching calls for a sense of personal and corporate responsibility for the education and welfare of the pupils in their charge.

Teachers should have the most direct impact on the day-to-day educational experiences of children because it is "their task to translate national policies into practical action in each school" (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2007: 93; cited by Harper and Dunkerly, 2009: 59). Yet, despite the centrality of the teacher to realizing UNESCO goals expressed through national initiatives, teachers are conspicuously absent from many locales for reasons ranging from safety issues for female teachers, to lack of teacher education, to conflict and displacement. This shortage of teachers and the shortage of trained professional teachers in particular, is a severe limit to the advancement of education locally and globally.

There should be the global identity of the teacher's functions as a universal yardstick against which the local teachers and schools can define themselves. Future research should focus on how teachers and schools name themselves. As indicated by UNESCO, the attainment of professional status may require considerable 'capacity-building' in some countries. In support of this increasing capacity building, the Nigerian Government should offer a number of initiatives and several specific publications; like Capacity Building of Teacher Training Institutions; and Teacher Professional Development as was initiated by UNESCO (cited by Harper and Dunkerly, 2009: 59).

Teacher as border-crosser

As evident in the development of the 2005 UNESCO document "Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education" the need for global or international standards, guidelines and transnational or supranational organizational structures concerning teachers and education is increasing. In the case of cross-border higher education, the UNESCO document indicates that since the 1980, the mobility of students, teachers, programs and institutions has grown considerably, together with new delivery modes and cross-border providers, such as campuses abroad, electronic delivery of higher education and for-profit providers. This creates challenges concerning quality control and accreditation that cannot be met by national frameworks (UNESCO, 2008: 8). Cross-border teaching speaks to the need for a more robust frame of globalization to better address circumstances of 21st century teaching and learning. Implicit in these guidelines is the notion that the teacher will be subject to and defined by the supranational organizations and structures that would determine accreditation quality practices, and fair credentialing.

Teacher as purveyor of human rights

The nature and specific work of the global teacher, is evident in the UNESCO/UNICEF documents on EFA, most notably in UNICEF's "A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education" (2007). This UNICEF document names the teacher as a professional with specific "rights" and particular responsibilities in relation to the teaching of human rights. Rights of the teacher are named explicitly, "Teachers are entitled to respect, remuneration and appropriate training and support, and they cannot fulfil their obligations to children unless these rights are realized." (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2007: 72). These are understood as the rights of a professional, which aligns with documents on the status of the teacher.

Inclusion

As part of the emphasis on education as a right of the child, inclusion is an important theme in the UNESCO documents. According to UNESCO's Guidelines for Inclusion, inclusion is seen as:

...a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children. (UNESCO, 2008: 8).

Teachers are ultimately the ones who bear the burden of this responsibility: "effective inclusion involves implementation both in school and in society at large. It is the regular teacher who has the utmost responsibility for the pupils and their day-to-day learning" (UNESCO, 2008b: 12). UNESCO indicates that countries need to define principles and practical ideas with regard to inclusion. These then can be interpreted and adapted to the context of individual countries (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2007: 65). The Nigerian government and ultimately the teacher should work from the foundation set by UNESCO and its member states. The articulation of inclusive education is an imperative.

Working in the context of rights-based education, the Nigerian teacher is to ensure that educational practice is:

child, respectful of all children, that the school and classroom culture ensures no discrimination of individuals or groups of individuals in respect of admission procedures, treatment in the classroom, opportunities for learning, access to examinations, opportunities to participate in particular activities, such as music or drama, or marking of work... Teachers need to take active measures to involve girls on an equal basis with boys (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2007: 95).

Redefining teacher education

Teacher education needs to be redefined. Teachers must become skilled in not only content, but also in context if child, rights-based education is to be realized. Within the framework of a human rights-based education, teachers, children and parents are to be involved in developing policies to ensure a school culture of respect and inclusion. Moreover teachers are encouraged to ensure local engagement with schools and that schools are responsive to local contexts "Within a framework of core standards and principles, individual schools should be able to adapt to the needs of the local community and provide a relevant curriculum that takes account of local concerns and priorities" (UNESCO/UNICEF, 2007: 96; cited by Harper and Dunkerly, 2009: 61). The Nigerian teacher is specifically named in relation to the work she is to undertake and the training she will need at the local level. She is to be responsive and engaged in the local context in meeting the UNESCO global initiatives.

The UNESCO teacher is to promote and practice sustainable development. In 2005, the United Nations declared a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development for which UNESCO serves as the lead agency. This declarator defined Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as providing students with the learning opportunities; that involve learning and respecting past global achievements while caring for and preserving our resources for the well being of all world citizens. It emphasizes the need to educate children to be caring citizens who exercise their rights and responsibilities locally, nationally and globally. Nigerian Teachers should not be left out in this sustainability.

While the documents referring to education for sustainable development may not be as numerous as those dealing with teacher education or human rights, they provide a focal aspect of the role of the teacher and education in UNESCO's world-view that is no less compelling. A Decade of Education for Sustainable Development Quarterly Update (July 2008) states emphatically the role of ESD: It constitutes the comprehensive approach to quality education and learning.

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